

## BLAIR ON PROHIBITION.

FAMILIAR ARGUMENTS RESTATED.

THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT, or the Conflict Between Man and Alcohol. By HENRY WILLIAM BLAIR, U.S. Senator from New-Hampshire. With Portrait and Map. \$1.00. New York: xiii, 388. Boston: William E. Scoville Company.

The evils caused by drink are so manifold and conspicuous, and make so hideous a showing when focused in one view, that scarcely any one who undertakes to examine them can fail to experience a strong desire that they might be cleared from the path of humanity by some heroic and summary effort. Nor is it singular that those who look into this subject a considerable number should feel that anything in the shape of compromise with the drink evil is paltering with the plainest duty; in making a "league with death and covenant with hell." The sentiment which inspires the advocates of Prohibition is therefore deserving of respect and not to be treated lightly or scoffingly. It is in its essence philanthropic, earnest, single-minded and distinctly in the line of progress; and the facts are such as to constitute in the hands of capable pleaders a tremendous indictment against drink. Senator Blair, of New-Hampshire, has been moved by public spirit and conscientious desire for the relief and elevation of his fellowmen to compose a book bringing together a strong array of the arguments, theories and statistics employed at present in so many forms and with such activity in furtherance of the cause of Prohibition. The Senator has argued the case in his own way, reinforcing his statements with abundant extracts from other writers, and bringing much native vigor to bear upon the subjects. His book is in fact an arsenal of Prohibition weapons which must prove of considerable value to the adherents of that cause, and he has added interest to it by inserting a number of portraits of notable people connected with the temperance movement.

There are indeed some points in his brief which seem of questionable veracity. The dispute about the physiological action of alcohol, for example, is certainly not in so advanced a state that it is possible for any one to deal with it as res adhibet. In fact, the frequent declaration of the Prohibitionists that alcohol is never a food, but always a poison, is apt to do more harm than good, inasmuch as it is very likely to strike the average mind as a wild and extravagant exaggeration. Of course, it would not be so insisted on did not the advocates of total abstinence fail to consider that however deplorable and mischievous the effects of alcoholic excess are, the fact remains that a great many more people use alcoholic drinks without abusing them than exceed. Were it not so drunkenness would have been on the increase continually, and we all know that had the situation is now it is very much better than fifty years ago, and that it is steadily improving. In most countries, Senator Blair makes place in his argument for his illiteracy bill, in rather a curious way, for it is odd that since he believes so clearly the bearing of education upon temperance he should not have seen the bearing of education upon prohibition. It is at this point that he and all who hold the same position lose their way and wander off into inconsequences. The Senator advocates National Prohibition. He would amend the Federal Constitution, and he thinks that there is some talismanic virtue in a constitutional amendment which would give efficiency to laws not founded upon public conviction.

It is not altogether encouraging to find a member of the United States Senate putting forward such views concerning legislation. The Prohibition remedy has now been tested under such various conditions that it is possible to draw some trustworthy conclusions from the results. The experience of Maine, collated with that of Kansas, fully justifies the belief that Prohibition cannot be applied successfully in cities and towns, and can be made effective where the population is mainly agricultural. These are facts, not speculations or conjectures, and they ought to be accepted. But they lead to still broader inferences. The reason why laws fall when they do fall is that they have not the indispensable support of public approval. Prohibition is out of the question in cities, because the majority of urban populations do not want and will not have it. The fact may be one to be regretted, but the lawlessness is manifestly unfit for his office who refuses to take it into account.

Prohibitionists are fond of saying that the failure of prohibitory laws is no more a reason for repealing them than the failure of laws against theft and murder is for abandoning the attempt to enforce them. It is strange that those who use this argument do not perceive where it carries them. As a matter of fact the law against murder does not infrequently fail for precisely the same reason that prohibitory laws fail. In parts of the south even now the law against murder is practically a dead letter, because a controlling element believes in private vengeance and upholds the practice of it. Not long ago, there were several places on the Rio Grande where the law against theft was equally ineffective. There's a controlling element consisted of horse and cattle thieves, brigands and desperadoes, and the sheriff and his deputies of the city marshal and his aids took their lives in their hands who attempted to arrest a criminal. The curious refusal of the Prohibitionists to perceive that total abstinence cannot be enforced by law anywhere until public opinion has been educated to the remuneration of alcoholic drink, has unquestionably hurt the cause of temperance. It has caused its advocates to be accused of unmeasuring fanaticism and blind bigotry, and by feeding ground for the charge of impiety. It has not only repelled many disengaged men who heartily abhor the drink evil, but it has put a formidable weapon into the hands of those whose interest it is to oppose whatever injures or threatens the liquor traffic.

Popular education has, however, been proceeding steadily, and the significance of the result obtained from temperance experiments in temperance legislation is now an open and public opinion is evidently becoming crystallized about a definite and rational remedy. That Prohibition is not the right specific both reason and experience sufficiently indicate. The American people have not been reared to the conviction that the consent of the governed is essential to the stability and effectiveness of government, to turn their backs upon it—so eminently sound a doctrine now. Nor are they blind to the lesson of the modern spirit, that spirit which, as represented alike in the science and the philosophy of the century, teaches the evolutionary principle. It is seen to-day that all advance, all gain in knowledge, all riddance of abuses, all progress in civilization, must be the work of time and gradual change and education. The striking spread of temperance doctrine, the marked improvement in social habits, which have taken place since the beginning of the century, have owed little to legislation; nearly everything to education. Conviction does not come by compulsion, but by persuasion. Society has been lifted out of the old rut in the matter of drinking, not by forbidding drunkenness, but by so elevating the general plane of thought that drunkenness became distasteful and shameful. Men, moreover, and especially Americans, will not tolerate coercion. Once convince them that drinking is wrong and hurtful, and they will abandon it, but tell them that they must abandon it whether they believe it to be wrong or not, and they straightway set themselves against the law, and bring it to naught, as they have done long since in the cities of Maine.

Senator Blair and his friends are wasting their energies in championing prohibition, which is impracticable; and they are retarding the progress of temperance by opposing high-tariff, which is practicable. Books like this may, perhaps, do some good in directing attention to the gravity of the problem; but their usefulness is more than counteracted by wresting the facts they bring together, in some cases of portions which are inherently sound; which lead away from the road to reform; and which can only, when accepted, lead to great waste of political and moral energy, while incidentally the liquor traffic itself is helped and encouraged by the perversity and unreasonableness of its professed opponents.

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